

**Statement of Sheikh Sackor
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Implementing the 1998 Torture Victims Relief Act”

**Subcommittee on Africa, Global Human Rights and International Operations
House Committee on International Relations**

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I am honored to be with you today, and I thank the Subcommittee for holding this important and timely hearing on the Torture Victims Relief Act.

Today, I speak to you:

-As someone who has directly suffered from the brutality of torture.

-As someone who has benefited enormously from the assistance of a torture treatment program funded by the Torture Victims Relief Act: the Bellevue/NYU Program for Survivors of Torture.

It is not easy to talk about what I have suffered, but I think it is important that you hear first-hand the brutality that is torture.

In my native country of Liberia, in 1997, I founded Humanist Watch Liberia, which advised my fellow Liberian citizens on their civil and political rights. I frequently spoke out against human rights abuses by the regime of Charles Taylor. As a result of my peaceful political activities aimed at promoting human rights and democracy in Liberia, I was imprisoned and brutally tortured by agents of the government.

While being interrogated, I was beaten all over my body. I was repeatedly shocked with electric wires. My interrogators kept accusing me of being anti-

government and threatening to kill me. They would shout at me “You are anti-government and we will one day kill you.” They also tried to force me to sign a retraction of a statement I made against the government. When I refused to sign, I was again brutally beaten.

Thanks to pressure from religious and human rights organizations, I was freed. However, I continued to be threatened and harassed, and lost my job at the National Social Security Office. I continued to speak out against human rights violations and was again tortured and imprisoned, including one imprisonment for almost a year. In gaining my release from this last imprisonment, I was greatly assisted by the U.S. Embassy in Liberia.

Continuing to fear for my safety, in 2003, I fled from Liberia and came to the United States, where I applied for political asylum. Subsequently, I learned about the Bellevue/NYU Program for Survivors of Torture.

Before receiving care from this remarkable Program, I felt so depressed and hopeless. I was in terrible pain-physically and emotionally. My back and muscles hurt from all the beatings I had endured. I couldn’t sleep. I felt frightened and so alone. I couldn’t stop thinking about what I had suffered. The Bellevue/NYU Program provided me with help and support. They gave me medical care to assist with the back and muscle aches I had. I was seen by an eye specialist, to address problems that I had, I believe as a result of being beaten, blindfolded and kept in the dark. I saw a skin doctor, who helped to make the scars from my torture less visible.

I also received mental health care including medications for several months to help me sleep and to feel less sad and nervous. I also participated in an African torture survivors group that the program sponsors. This made me feel less isolated. Doctors from the Program wrote an affidavit for my asylum application and in 2004, I was granted political asylum.

The Bellevue/NYU Program has become like a family to me. The Program provided me with clothing and food. They also helped me to find a job. Now I am working at the Federal Reserve Bank of New York. This program helped me regain and rebuild my life.

Mine is a story like so many other individuals around the country cared for by the torture treatment centers funded by the Torture Victims Relief Act. But I know

from my fellow torture victims now living here in the United States, and that the need for more services is enormous.

I urge you to do whatever you can to increase funding for the centers doing this important work. For survivors of torture, this is truly a matter of life and death.

Thank you.